DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 830 CE 065 886

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TITLE Good Practice in Continuing Vocational Education: The Role of Academic Staff. UCACE Occasional Paper No. 10.
INSTITUTION Universities Council for Adult and Continuing Education, Leicester (England).
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education and Science, London (England).
PUB DATE May 92
NOTE 36p.; For related documents, see ED 361 519 and CE 065 887-888.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Colleges; *Continuing Education; Demonstration Programs; Educational Research; Excellence in Education; Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Evaluation; *Teacher Motivation; Teacher Qualifications; *Teacher Role; *Vocational Education; Vocational Education Teachers
IDENTIFIERS Great Britain

ABSTRACT

A study concentrated on the occupational goals of academic staff in British higher education who work for some or part of their time as practitioners of continuing vocational education (CVE). The sample consisted of 27 academic staff working in 3 polytechnics, 4 universities, and 1 polyversity and 3 Regional Development Agents (RDAs). The instrument was a semistructured questionnaire, identical for all academic staff and slightly modified for the RDAs. All respondents believed the main purpose of CVE was to encourage good relations on behalf of the institution and the local community by providing high quality training responsive to market needs. Senior staff and practitioners described excellence in a CVE practitioner in terms of personal characteristics and knowledge- and skill-based characteristics. They felt the purposes of staff development were updating in subject-specific knowledge and skills training for CVE. All respondents regarded standards of performance with respect to teaching as being implicit and identified formal and informal mechanisms for feedback. Factors that motivated lecturers to work in this area related either to personal satisfaction or career goals. Senior academic staff most often identified organizational barriers as barriers that prevented good practice from being realized. Practitioners also cited career, status, and conditions of service and barriers concerned with income generation. (The instrument is appended.) (YLB)

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The Role Of Academic Staff

by Stella Parker, City University &
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Thames Valley and North West London

Preface

This paper was produced as part of a Department for Education funded project on Good Practice in University Continuing Vocational Education. It is one of four 'key issue' reports which have been produced as UCACE Occasional Papers.

Copies of all four reports can be obtained from the UCACE Office, Department of Continuing Education, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL.

The four reports are:

- The Internal Organisation of Continuing Education
- The Role of Academic Staff
- Buildings/Capital Investment
- Financial Control and Encouragement

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who took part in this study.

They are very busy people and willingly gave up their time to talk to us. We hope that this report gives some indication of their enthusiasm and commitment.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The academic staff who work in universities in continuing vocational education (CVE) have conditions of service which appear to be more flexible than those who do similar work in polytechnics. Apart from a small number of university staff who are required to by contractual obligations to work in this area, most university staff who do, have chosen to do so. Polytechnic staff are generally required to do so.

One reason for this is historical, in that CVE has long been part of the mission of polytechnics, whereas this is not the case for many universities.

In spite of their varied backgrounds and experiences of CVE, all those who were interviewed for this study expressed views and attitudes which were remarkably similar with respect to the aims of CVE and the best way to carry them out.

The location of CVE practitioners within an organisation does not appear to affect their ability to achieve the aims of CVE. In their view, the most important facilitating factor is support and encouragement from senior management.

If CVE is to expand in universities, this support is vital and should provide, amongst other things, staff development programmes for CVE which inculcate good practice, as well as imaginative and flexible criteria for promotion and good quality administrative and clerical support.

Introduction

This study concentrates on some of the occupational goals of academic staff in higher education who work for some or part of their time as practitioners of continuing vocational education (CVE). The organisations which form the basis of this study include universities, polytechnics and one merged institution, a "polyversity".

Academic staff in higher education are like any other occupational group in that they exhibit behaviour patterns that are directed towards the achievement of particular goals. These are both occupational and personal; the former are those that relate to the aims of the organisation, and include activities concerned with the education of students, the writing of research papers and the publication of scholarly works. The latter goals are more nebulous, and cover areas such as personal satisfaction and growth.

It is the occupational goals and their concomitant activities leading to the achievement of good practice in CVE that are the primary concern of this report. For the purposes of this study, the goals are identified as those that are recognised and rewarded by the employing organisation.

Organisations usually reward those who successfully achieve valued goals by some means or other; in higher education recognition of success is generally by means of promotion. In order to clarify what these goals might be with reference to CVE, we sought the views of those who have achieved promotion, that is senior academics in CVE. We considered that they are in a good position to identify goals and describe how they may best be achieved for two reasons. The first is that having achieved organisational recognition themselves, they are likely to know what the goals are. The second is that these people are responsible for the promotion of their junior staff, are thus required as part of their job to recognise what best practice in CVE may be. Their descriptions of best practice in CVE thus provide the benchmark for this study.

However, these descriptions are likely to represent an ideal, and may not take full account of what happens in reality. Reality is the experience of CVE practitioners, and one of the aims of this study is to see how their descriptions of reality and the ideal match up, with a view to identifying factors which encourage its realisation and any barriers that may prevent it.

There is little doubt that CVE in universities is expanding; for some academic staff it represents a completely new sphere of activity, whilst for others it is an extension of previous areas of work. One of the purposes of this study is to examine how they, as professional continuing educators, go about "learning the ropes" and how they view any support provided by the organisation in terms of staff development. In addition the study will examine these same aspects with respect to lecturers who work in polytechnics, where "vocationally oriented" education has long been part of their mission.

The organisations in this study, although having much in common in terms of overall aims, are all unique in terms of their history, culture and locality. Each of these factors affects the organisational aims of CVE, concerned as it is with providing for the immediate environment. How these aims are realised will vary, and consequently what is regarded as best practice in one organisation may not be the case in another. This study attempts to highlight what, if any, these differences are.

One of the distinctive features of CVE is that practitioners are advised to liaise with their local DES officials, the Pickup Regional Development Agents (RDAs), particularly with respect to the annual monitoring exercises which are closely linked to funding. This close liaison with external officials is not normally the case in higher education, where academic staff enjoy professional autonomy. The RDAs thus have a rare external perspective on CVE practitioners in higher education and their roles.

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This study also includes some comments from RDAs concerning the roles of CVE practitioners in universities and polytechnics.

A word of caution here - the study is based on a very small sample of individuals' responses; as such, we cannot make a.1y broad generalisations based on the views expressed here. However, it does provide a window into some aspects of the practice of CVE, and how those who are involved in its delivery feel about their role and their tasks.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of a total of 27 academic staff working in 3 polytechnics, 4 universities and one polyversity. Of these, all but one were employed as full-time academic staff.

	Full-time staff*	Part-time staff
Universities 4	**senior staff 4	0
	Practitioners 7	1
Polyversity 1	Senior staff 1	0
	Practitioners 2	0
Polytechnics 3	Senior staff 3	0
	Practitioners 6	0
TOTAL	23	1

In addition, three RDAs agreed to be interviewed for this project, making a total of 27 responses.

* *Full-time means on a tenured, fixed-term or continuing contract with the institution. However, some of these staff worked only part-time (as secondees) in continuing education.*

** *Senior staff means having managerial responsibility for CVE.*

A list of the organisations which agreed to take part in this study can be found in Appendix 1.

Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was constructed,the questions being identical for all academic staff and slightly modified for the RDAs.

A copy of the questionnaires can be found in Appendix 2.

Procedure

The questionnaires were sent by post, after a letter had been sent to heads of Departments and Centres, requesting their cooperation.

The questionnaire formed the basis of face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews. The data was recorded in note form and used as the basis of this report.

The answers to the questions have been organised under question headings, and the report therefore is an amalgam of replies; only in certain cases are answers quoted in full or part, to illustrate or amplify points. In these cases, the anonymity of the respondents has been preserved.

Conditions of service

Full-time academic staff in higher education who spend all or some of their time on continuing education activities are appointed on the same terms and conditions as their colleagues in all other departments. In universities these appointments have the same procedures prescribed for all academic appointments, the salary grades being : Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor. In polytechnics the grades are similar, but there is an additional grade above Senior Lecturer, that of Principal Lecturer.

All full time permanent academic staff are appointed on probation for an agreed period which is usually one year or two. Their appointments are subject to a process of confirmation after the prescribed period of probation. In most cases, university and polytechnic statutes include the provision of dismissal for good cause although the details may vary between organisations. In universities, full time staff are eligible to apply for sabbatical leave, but this is not the case in polytechnics.Maternity leave, early retirement or voluntary severance, are available in those universities where such schemes are in operation. The position is more variable in polytechnics.

In universities, some academic staff in continuing education have tenure, but this does not exist in the polytechnics. Those university staff who have been appointed since the abolition of tenure have contracts which are either "continuing" or "fixed-term". Whilst the former type indicates a certain amount of job security, the latter does not, particularly if the fixed term is a year or two. Generally, renewal of these contracts is dependent upon funding available only on a year to year basis or on the generation of income from short course activities. This is also the position in polytechnics.

In most universities, the criteria for promotion are outstanding accomplishments in research, teaching, administration and/or contribution to the work of the department and the university, whereas in most polytechnics the criteria depend more on level of work taught and administrative responsibilities.

All academic staff are required by the terms of their appointment to be engaged in teaching and research and to carry out such other duties as prescribed. In polytechnics, staff spend less of their time on research than do university academics (Whitburn et al 1976), but this may change with the merger of the two higher education funding councils in 1993.

In some universities, a slightly different set of criteria exist in recognition of the particular duties which continuing educators are expected to undertake. A survey carried out by Sawyers et al (1987) indicated that university staff in departments of continuing education spend their time on the four activities listed below:

Teaching - A minimum being about eight hours per week;

Administration - Concerned mainly with generating, monitoring and assessing some part of the department's programme of courses;

External Liaison - Identifying needs, marketing, community groups, etc.;

Research - Because they are required to undertake research, university continuing educators differ from staff employed in other institutions of adult education.

In each of the universities which took part in this study, it became clear that CVE lecturers spend their working hours as described above. However, each individual comes to an agreement with his/her head of department or centre on the amount of time to be allocated to the only quantifiable activity,i.e. timetabled teaching hours.

The negotiable arrangements that exist for university academics contrast sharply with those experienced by their colleagues in the polytechnics. Polytechnic lecturers have clearly defined conditions of service with respect to the number of timetabled teaching hours.This number is a set one for each grade of lecturer, and remission given only in exceptional circumstances. In addition to teaching, polytechnic staff spend their time on research and administration, which includes external liaison.

Sawyers' report (op. cit.) did not provide any quantitative data as to how much time university lecturers spent on each of the above activities. It is notable that the report contains little reference to any activities concerned with vocational, full cost courses and it refers to 'students' throughout rather than 'clients' or 'customers'. These latter terms have only recently entered the vocabulary of university continuing education since the DES introduced its first major initiative for the development of full cost courses within university Continuing Education departments in 1987. A recent UCACE report (1991) indicates that staff are now involved in more full cost activities than ever before, and that the amount of time spent on this activity is increasing. Data gathered by Parker (1991) shows that a significant proportion of university lecturers employed in departments or centres of continuing education spend about one quarter of their time on each of the above activities, including external liaison.

Interacting with the external environment has long been recognised as part of the activities of higher education academic staff. Startup (1979) categorised these interactions for university lecturers into the four main classes shown below. Whitburn et al (op.cit.) described a similar pattern for polytechnic staff.

i) liaison with respect to research and teaching in other institutions

ii) activities concerned with the professional or disciplinary community

iii) consultancy and/or other fee generating activities

iv) local networking eg with respect to school liaison etc.

For those university staff engaged in CVE, the second and third of the above classes can occupy a significant proportion of their working hours. The main purpose of this external liaison is to react to and fulfil the needs of client groups, such as industry, business and the professions. This has always been one of the purposes of the polytechnics, (DES,1966), but not of the universities, until relatively recently. Traditionally,university lecturers make decisions about curriculum content without reference to any group apart from their academic colleagues. It is this reference to the needs of external groups and the liaison required to bring it about which distinguish CVE practitioners from their colleagues in "mainstream" departments.

There are some similarities in the conditions of service for staff working in CVE in both universities and polytechnics. For some staff, it is part of their normal timetabled hours; for others, it is an extra, for which they or the department reaps financial reward. To some extent, this depends on where the CVE practitioner is located, and the aims of the department with respect to CVE.

The location of CVE practitioners in this study

Respondents were located in one of the four ways described below.

Practitioner in a specialist academic department (eg Law or Engineering)

Examples of this occur in both universities and polytechnics.

In this case, practitioners spend part of their time on CVE, the remainder being spent on traditional undergraduate and post graduate teaching and related activities.

In almost all cases, these practitioners were given some form of recognition for their involvement in CVE. In the case of the universities,recognition was by means of a title (e.g. Director of short courses in), but did not carry any additional remuneration.

In the case of the polytechnics, recognition was in the form of remission from teaching contact hours, and in some cases any teaching done in excess of the required number was eligible for additional payment.

Practitioner in an academic department which specialises in adult and/or continuing education

Examples of this occur only in the universities, and practitioners spend their time entirely on specialist CVE activities (eg updating courses for some aspect of industry), or part of their time is spent on CVE and the remainder on adult "liberal" education.

Any surplus income generated by CVE activities went towards departmental expenditure, including the salaries of other staff in the department, but not to individuals as additional payment.

Practitioner in a unit which specialises in one specific area of CVE

In this study, this arrangement was found only in universities, and such units being concerned only with management development.

These units are "self-financing" in that they aim to cover all their operational costs through CVE programmes.

Practitioner located outside an organisation

Some practitioners are employed part-time by the organisation, being engaged on part-time contracts for a specific programme or course.

These are the people referred to in this study as external expert practitioners, and are commonly regarded as vital components of the CVE network.

Such people are always paid for their services, some of them commanding fees at the commercial rate (ie well above the normal hourly rate paid by universities and polytechnics).

The purposes of CVE

Located as they are, within different structures of different organisations, but with the experience of CVE in common, we sought the views of practitioners and senior staff on the purposes of CVE. The summary below represents their views in response to the question, "What are the purposes of CVE, with respect to your department?".

The views of senior staff

The main purpose of CVE is to encourage good relations on behalf of the university/polytechnic and the local community, by providing high quality training which is responsive to market needs and which generates income.

Where there is centralised responsibility for CVE, the unit concerned should provide administrative support to other departments in the organisation, as well as encouraging the development of opportunities for the expansion of CVE at departmental and subject area level. The latter includes taking a leading role in relevant areas of curriculum development, such as Credit Accumulation and Transfer schemes, interdisciplinary programmes, increasing access etc.

Specialised CVE units should co ordinate activities such as making bids on behalf of the organisation to appropriate funding bodies and tapping new sources of income. Such units should also monitor all CVE activity within the organisation to satisfy the requirements of funding bodies, and have responsibility for issues of quality with respect to CVE.

The views of practitioners

Many of the points made above were also articulated by practitioners. In addition some of whom were located in "mainstream" departments commented on the lack of profile accorded to CVE, mainly because it was regarded as a marginal activity by other staff in the department and/or did not receive support from the the departmental head. These views are expanded further in "Barriers", see below.

If these are the purposes of CVE, how are they brought about? We asked senior staff and practitioners for their views on this question.

What are the purposes of a CVE practitioner?

There was a great deal of similarity in the answers given by all senior staff to this question and the main points are summarised below.

The views of senior academic staff

The purposes of a CVE practitioner are to understand the market and to be able to identify its needs by means of market research. In addition, practitioners should be proactive and anticipate clients' needs before they articulate them.

Based on this understanding, a major purpose of CVE practitioners is to design and deliver courses and programmes that fit the needs of clients but at the same time maintain a balance between academic content and relevance and applicability.

Practitioners need to be able to teach and/or deliver information in a variety of ways to a very high standard (sometimes referred to as commercial standards).

In addition, they should make use of expert practitioners in the design and delivery of programmes/courses.

They need to be aware of the university's/polytechnic's resources and services and to be able to use them to advantage in the design and delivery of CVE.

As a result of the successful delivery of programmes, they should generate income for the department/organisation.

It is important that they are able to maintain links with networks of clients and expert practitioners after programmes/courses have run.

They should be able to carry out research linked to CVE.

There was much common ground between the views of practitioners and those of senior staff. There was also almost complete agreement between the views of university and polytechnic lecturers, although several polytechnic respondents made comments about the (perceived) differences between the two providers, for example, "The polytechnic [is] more responsible to local needs, which I would see as one of the distinctive characteristics of the Polytechnic as opposed to a university".

However, this did not seem to be the view of university-based CVE practitioners, who constantly stressed their commitment to providing for the needs of business, industry and the professions in the locality.

The summary below represents the views of both university and polytechnic practitioners who are employed in one of the ways described above. It differs from the views of senior staff only in matters of detail concerned with the intricacies of practice, and should be read as an addition to their answers.

The views of the one part-time respondent are not included here. They differed from those of full time staff, in that he saw purpose as being mainly in terms of delivering high quality programmes, without any of the organisational purposes raised by full time staff.

The views of practitioners

The purpose of a CVE practitioner is to enhance the university's/polytechnic's image in the local region, using media such as newspaper coverage, television, radio etc. to report on successful ventures and to advertise forthcoming events. It is also to enhance the university's/polytechnic's image with local employers, in terms of being expert in practice as well as theory.

Related to this is the need to build up a network of local employers with whom undergraduate and post graduate students may be offered work experience placements, and to encourage local companies to collaborate with the university/polytechnic in applied research projects.

In relation to the organisation, there are several purposes. One is to expand and integrate CVE into the department's provision, and to make it planned and coherent. The other involves generating an an interest in the practice of CVE in other staff in the department, and to give help and advice to them, if necessary.

One respondent stated that the responsibility for the quality assurance of the department's CVE programmes should be one of the purposes of a CVE practitioner.

The views of Regional Development Agents (RDAs)

Regional Development Agents, by the nature of their job, have an overview of CVE provision in the educational institutions for which they have responsibility. Their responses to these same questions concerning the nature of CVE work therefore provides an external perspective on the matter.

The purposes are the same as those for any other lecturer in higher education, but in particular they are also responsible for CVE in some way or other. In many cases, this is added to what is considered to be normal work, ie it is grafted on.

In particular, they are expected to be aware of and sensitive to the world outside the institution, and be capable of liaising with external organisations with respect to their training needs.

To fulfil this purpose, they have to negotiate, market, sell and get repeat business.

They also need to be aware of the range of provision offered by the institution and be capable of encouraging lecturers to adapt their provision to match market needs.

An important purpose is to develop appropriate materials and delivery mechanisms for programmes and courses in CVE.

They should be active in applied research and by this means maintain strong contacts with industry. This is particularly true for specialist,leading edge areas.

They should generate income.

Excellence in terms of a CVE practitioner

How would you describe excellence in a CVE practitioner?

Having thrown some light on the roles and tasks of practitioners, we then asked how excellence is recognised, bearing in mind that the organisational reward for excellence is generally promotion.

The views of senior staff

The answers to this question fell into two broad categories; one was concerned with personal characteristics and the other with the knowledge and skills required to do the job.

Personal characteristics

An excellent practitioner is one who has energy and enthusiasm.

He/she is able to detect new opportunities and new ways of doing things, and has a willingness to try out new ideas from whatever source. He/she is a risk -taker, and if risks or new ideas fail, has sufficient self-confidence to admit to his/her mistakes.

An excellent practitioner is some one who always delivers on time, and can be relied on to deliver to a guaranteed and acceptable standard under any conditions. He/she is organised, clear and concise and can communicate well, is able to get on well with people, and has a respect for students/clients and their needs.

He/she will not use teaching to boost his/her ego, but will regard it as an opportunity to enable learning to take place. The excellent practitioner is very practical and at the same time reflective.

Knowledge and skill based characteristics

An excellent practitioner is knowledgeable about his/her specialist area, and is able to find out what aspects of continuing education are required or necessary for their particular field.

There are excellent non-specialists who are able to find out what clients need with respect to broad, general issues and can use their resources to satisfy these needs.

He/she has good contacts with clients and knows how to market continuing education to them; that is,to negotiate and to sell.

He/she is able to make excellent presentations, both in terms of teaching and of materials.

The views of practitioners

The answers to this question have been classified into two categories -that of personal characteristics and that of knowledge and skills based attributes.

Personal characteristics

An excellent practitioner is one who is efficient, well prepared and organised. He/she is capable of establishing good relationships with students/clients and others, and is sensitive to their needs.

Excellence practitioners are creative and innovative, which is important in this acutely competitive market. They are prepared to work in the commercial market and to give clients what they expect in terms of value for money.

They maintain links with students/clients after programmes have finished. They play an important role in the the affairs of their relevant industry/commerce or profession by means of involvement in committees, professional bodies, etc.

Knowledge and skill characteristics

An excellent practitioner has extensive knowledge of his/her industry/commerce or profession and knows all the right people.

He/she is able to assess quickly and accurately what clients need or expect, and can market and sell programmes well.

He/she is flexible in terms of being able to deliver to groups with different needs, and is capable of using a variety of teaching methods such as lectures, seminar groups, T groups etc.

He/she will be capable of linking theory with practice, thus gaining credibility in the eyes of clients/students. He/she will continue contacts with client/students by means of an "after care " service such as providing reading lists, problem solving and advice services and will attempt to assess if change has been brought about in individuals or organisations over a period of time.

Staff development or, continuing education for CVE practitioners

The descriptions above are of what CVE practitioners do or are expected to do. Many of their tasks are skills and knowledge based, so we attempted to examine the views on training and updating programmes that universities and polytechnics provide for staff who are involved in CVE provision by asking the following questions:

Are there opportunities available for training and updating in CVE? If so, what should be the purposes of such training?

Several respondents suggested that induction programmes for new staff should contain a CVE element, for two reasons; one to provide training in good practice and the second to indicate the organisation's commitment to this area of work and raise its profile.

Another point stressed by several respondents was that any techniques learned for teaching CVE could also benefit undergraduate teaching.

Where specific CVE training was provided, practitioners were not required to attend.

The views of senior academic staff

The purposes of such training were described as twofold: updating in subject specific knowledge and skills training for CVE.

The topics to be covered in the latter should, according to respondents, include the management of CVE, marketing and the skills needed to develop and deliver short courses.

It was mentioned by several respondents that staff development could take several forms, one being counselling given by senior staff to novices, on the basis of a systematic evaluation of their performance. Another form could include attendance at conferences, workshops etc.

A final point to make is that several respondents noted that staff development in CVE should be not only for academic staff -administrative staff have an important role to play, and any training aimed at updating their skills would lead to improvements in programmes.

The views of CVE practitioners

All of the points covered in the responses given above were also identified by this group of respondents. In addition, some replied that they implement their own programme of self-development by attending courses elsewhere in order to pick up new ideas about presentation, reading about innovative methods of presentation, trying out new methods and conducting systematic evaluations by means of client/student questionnaires.

It was also mentioned that existing training programmes are rather traditional in that they do not address the needs of the individual, and all respondents commented on the lack of time available for training activities. One respondent (a private consultant) stressed the importance of having time available for updating, reading and reflection, but mentioned how difficult this can be when working for oneself, as time spent this way does not generate income.

Standards of performance

For a significant proportion of the respondents, working in CVE was a relatively new experience, particularly for those who had spent much of their career in higher education teaching younger students. The exceptions to this were those who were employed in university departments of adult and/or continuing education and in some polytechnics with an established CVE programme.

Whatever their background, all respondents stressed the different skills, techniques and attitudes that were required to teach successfully on CVE programmes. The reasons given for this revolve around the background and expectations of client groups, and can be summed up in the following response given by one practitioner, "If you can get positive feedback from a group of middle aged and cynical managers from the ----- industry, you know that you have succeeded".

Several respondents made similar comments to this and we pursued the implications contained in this statement by asking the questions below:

Are there standards of performance? If so, how were they set?

How do you go about finding out if standards of performance are not met?

In several institutions, notes for guidance on matters concerning CVE were available to practitioners, but they were not required to abide by them. They covered matters such as marketing, financial management and delivery, and had been compiled by a central unit with responsibility for CVE.

Standards of performance with respect to teaching were in all cases regarded as being implicit, but in some cases other targets of performance were expected as part of a departmental plan. These included projected income, number of courses, student numbers etc, in other words, the information required for monitoring purposes by the Funding Councils.

The views of senior academic staff

All respondents recognised the need for feedback on programmes and courses, and none were able to describe any comprehensive, systematic and formalised system such as that which exists for undergraduate courses. Several expressed the view that there should be a centrally administered procedure, whilst others made the point that obtaining feed back was only part of the process; attention also needs to be given to making use of it.

The mechanisms for feedback included both formal and informal methods. Examples of the former were:

Observation of classes by the programme director or departmental head.

- Evaluation questionnaires from students/clients at the end of the course.

A meeting with the entire client group at the end of the programme, including the company training officer.

In all these examples, a report was prepared and given back to the practitioner.

Informal feedback mechanisms included talking to students/clients over a drink or a meal during the course. Another was return and/or repeat business; this was quoted by many respondents as being of particular value as a feedback mechanism.

When complaints were made, it was generally related to poor organisation and/or badly structured material. Poor performance in one instance was not generally

regarded as failure; failure was a deterioration in performance over a period of time.

Most senior academics were confident that they received enough feedback to be able to make judgements about those for whom they had responsibility. Poor performers would, in some cases be counselled and given guidance, but consistently poor performance could lead to an individual being removed from the sphere of CVE activities.

It is worth mentioning here that poor performance did not seem to be a problem where staff volunteered to offer a CVE programme or course; only in cases where staff had been required to do this work did problems occasionally occur.

The views of practitioners

When asked as to how they came to an understanding of standards of performance, practitioners gave the replies below, which have been categorised as either formal or informal.

The formal procedures described below were described as being the most useful.

Direction from a senior academic (eg head of department), which involved discussion as to a practitioner's role and responsibilities as the manager and promoter of a CVE programme/course. This would also include some information on the nature of the client group.

In addition or alternatively, staff development sessions, covering similar ground, were available for some practitioners new to CVE.

Where written materials (ie guidelines) were available, these were rarely mentioned as having been useful. Indeed, in one organisation where the guidelines had been described by the senior academic as being "widely available and used by all staff", the practitioners did not know of their existence.

By having a business plan, which includes quantified targets such as numbers of programmes, income , expenditure etc.

By preparing plans for programme /course organisation and delivery, and through discussion, prioritising and timetabling actions to be taken. This includes a teaching plan, covering content,teaching methods, assessment of student/client learning etc.

By not having, as a novice, full responsibility for a new programme.

Through observations whilst teaching, followed by feedback discussion and guidance if necessary.

Feedback from students by means of questionnaires.

Results of pre and post tests.

Via annual staff appraisals.

Informal methods included.

Discussions with students in the bar etc.

Discussions with more experienced programme/course organisers.

By having " an ear to the ground" through a variety of networks that provide feedback on programmes, such as personnel/training officers of client companies.

By meeting at regular intervals with other practitioners to discuss areas of mutual interest with respect to the delivery of programmes/courses.

By informal reports on the efficacy of a programme/course from training/personnel officers several months after completion.

Return and/or repeat business.

All this indicates that the elements of a sophisticated and flexible system of setting standards and monitoring performance exists for this area of work within the higher education system.

Is this apparent from the outside ?

The views of RDAs

The views expressed are summarised in the following extracts from replies.

"Lecturers tend to set their own standards, which in general are higher than in the mainstream.because people on these courses have paid. "

"In general terms the individual is bothered by quality,not.the institution".

"Polytechnics..tend to make statements about quality and set up working parties, much more so than the university sector. They are also politically more aware than the university sector, and [recognise] that quality is an issue with which they ought to be concerned".

With respect to mechanisms available for monitoring performance, answers included questionnaire feedback, repeat/return business etc.

"None of the mechanisms are pro-active, nobody in the institutions goes out of their way to find out if things have been successful or unsuccessful".

"Post course questionnaires are sent to a central unit and followed up by them; also repeat business. These are very largely reactive mechanisms".

In universities those who work in CVE have chosen to do so. As a result, they are working on the fringes of mainstream activity, which can be a lonely and isolated place to be.

In polytechnics, some choose to work in CVE, others are required to do so, but will not be permitted to continue in this area for long if their performance is poor. Although continuing education, in the broadest sense, seems to be more integrated into the mainstream in the polytechnics than in the universities, their non- accredited CVE is, in some cases, regarded as a fringe activity, with all its attendant consequences in career terms.

What motivates people to do this sort of work ?

The views of senior academic staff

Their views on the factors that motivate lecturers to work in this area can be classified as either goals concerned with personal satisfaction or those concerned with career goals, although the latter were not necessarily linked to promotion.

Career goals

They regard working with the professions, industry, commerce and the service sector as being the forefront of knowledge generation.

It also provides opportunities for the development of relationships between the academic specialist and good practitioners in the field, and this can have spin- offs for research and consultancy.

Many have an over riding enthusiasm for spreading and sharing knowledge in their particular specialist field.

It provides opportunities to set up private consultancies.

It can provide a new avenue of interest for some staff, particularly if they are encouraged to use new techniques and/or technology for innovative delivery.

In some cases, it can be the source of income generation which can be spent on new equipment, travel for conferences, etc.

Involvement in CVE activities can be a criterion for promotion.

For external practitioners, status and public relations with respect to having links with a university or polytechnic were considered to be of importance.

Personal goals

A desire to relate to people in a helpful and supportive way ie enabling other people to achieve self realisation and self-confidence was considered to be an important factor.

Challenge and stimulation were mentioned by a significant number of respondents.

For some, the opportunity to make extra money.

The views of CVE practitioners

The responses given by practitioners matched very closely those given above. However, practitioners expressed their reasons for working in CVE in a manner

which was extremely enthusiastic and which indicated their dedication to this field of work. This was true even for those who had not chosen initially to practice CVE, but had been required by their departments to do so.

Career goals

In addition to those identified by senior academics, it is worth noting these points made time and again by practitioners.

Having a profile and function which is recognised by the organisation, eg short course director.

Having the power that goes with that title in influencing and deciding the future direction of CVE activities.

The possibility of remission from timetabled teaching hours to liberate time for the development of CVE.

Having access to "real life" problems as the basis for new, applied research.

Making money for the department and/or earning extra pay.

Improving promotion prospects. This was mentioned by only two respondents.

Personal goals

Motivating factors expressed in this category seemed to be the most numerous and the most powerfully expressed. The words used most frequently by practitioners to describe the reasons for their involvement were "excitement" and "challenge". The summary below can only provide a pale reflection of these feelings.

The challenge of designing innovative programmes in collaboration with professional people.

The challenge of encouraging professionals to become reflective practitioners.

The opportunity to be creative and flexible.

The excitement of problem solving and trouble shooting.

The challenge of working outside the boundaries of the organisation.

The opportunity to take risks, that is not being governed entirely by market forces.

Relating to people in a helpful and supportive way was also considered to be an important motivating factor, and all of the points mentioned by senior academics were repeated by practitioners.

In particular,the opportunity to work with non traditional students and supporting them, drawing out their potential in whatever way is appropriate was considered to be important.

The views of RDAs

Their responses matched the above very closely, and there was complete agreement on the motivating aspect of "working on the edge" of the organisation and of forging external contacts.

The following quote summarises most of the points made by RDAs. "The motivating aspects tend to be both institutional and personal. Lecturers do it because they enjoy doing it. They do allege other philosophical reasons, but mainly it is because they gain personal and professional satisfaction from dealing with this kind of client. Income generation is another factor, but it is not an exclusive one. It must also be said that the appraisal system now includes CVE as an element, and there are obvious spin- offs into research."

The barriers that prevent good practice from being realised

All practitioners expressed enjoyment and career satisfaction through their involvement in CVE, but it was obvious from some of their responses that the attraction of working on the boundaries of the organisation can be detrimental to good practice. We asked them to identify any barriers that prevent them from achieving as much as they would like to.

The views of senior academic staff

The most frequently identified barriers were organisational. In particular, the perceived lack of status given to CVE activities was the most often mentioned barrier. Manifestations of this included the very few rewards given to CVE practitioners, particularly with respect to promotion.

This problem appeared to be particularly acute in the universities, where the perception was that promotion depended on output in research and scholarship only. Even in universities where CVE was written into the criteria for promotion, this was regarded with cynicism, as no one had ever heard of an individual who had been identified as an excellent practitioner and promoted for this reason.

In the polytechnics, the picture was different, several having strategies for CVE with senior academics in charge of certain areas and who had been promoted for this reason. However, even here, opinions were occasionally expressed which indicated that commitment was in nominal terms only.

The views of CVE practitioners

The views expressed above were echoed in the responses given by practitioners. Although poor promotion prospects did concern them, it was only one of the three categories given below.

Career, status and conditions of service

Staff on short term contracts regard themselves as being different and inferior to other staff. This feeling of inferiority is further exacerbated by the short term nature of their contracts and the knowledge that they are not able to benefit from the conditions of service enjoyed by other staff, for example sabbatical leave, in the case of the universities.

The most commonly mentioned barrier is lack of the time necessary to develop high quality CVE. The time required for satisfactory liaison with clients and the development of programmes is, in the eyes of practitioners, much greater than is allowed for by the organisation.

University staff, who become involved through choice, have therefore taken the decision to sacrifice time which could be spent on other activities which are not timetabled. These include research and/or publication. Outstanding accomplishment in these two areas are perceived by staff as being most important for promotion. Staff who choose CVE are consciously blighting their promotion prospects; this can act as a disincentive to all but the most commited staff.

For polytechnic staff, the picture is different but the results are similar. Some have little choice; they are required to be involved in CVE, but this can mean that a significant proportion of their time is devoted to non degree work. This can affect promotion prospects adversely.

The various activities which are necessary for developing CVE (eg marketing, needs analysis etc.) do not fit neatly into the working pattern of academic life. This is

because the clients for whom CVE is provided have imperatives and work patterns which are different from those in universities and polytechnics. Matching them can be difficult and time-consuming.

The one respondent who worked part-time mentioned that working outside of the protective and buffering boundaries of an organisation meant that he was subjected to the unpredictable effects of the market. His pattern of work was never stable, and consisted of episodic peaks and troughs in the level of work. The peaks were particularly frantic, giving little time for reflection and development and the troughs emotionally draining because they represent insecurity.

Organisational barriers

Perceived lack of organisational commitment acts as a barrier; Respondents expressed the view that CVE is not regarded as being central to the aims of the organisation or to departments. Manifestations of this include lack of a single interface between the organisation and industry, business and/or commerce; in some cases, lack of investment in accommodation and facilities. Where organisations have made plans to expand CVE, this is not always supported by investment in training programmes for all staff (not only for those delivering programmes face-to-face).

Because many CVE activities are interdisciplinary the strength of the departmental and/or faculty structure makes it difficult to work across these boundaries. Departmental attitudes play a part here too; departments which have buoyant undergraduate and post graduate intakes often question the need for CVE. As a result,the attitude of academic staff in many departments is that CVE is irrelevant.

However, there are some departments which have good reputations for developing "leading edge" technology, and here there are generally some staff who have an interest in relationships with industry. Sometimes these relationships may take the from of CVE activities. Whilst having the enthusiasm, their standards of delivery (including teaching) may be poor, and they may not be aware of this. More support, both in terms of training and additional administrative and marketing staff, are required if organisations are to make good these deficiencies.

Barriers concerned with income generation

Although the need to generate income is recognised as being important it should not be the prime consideration. When this happens, staff feel under pressure and feel a lack of balance.

Having to develop activities on a self financing basis without the benefit of development funding can lead to conservatism and a reluctance to be innovative.

Having to "sell" courses using methods which are more commonly used by professional salespersons can be a disincentive to academic staff who feel much better at persuading people by means of reasoned argument, rather than by "hard sell".

The income generated through applied research which is CVE oriented is not recognised by the funding bodies in their research selectivity exercise. Again, this leads to a feeling of isolation from the values of the organisation.

Investment in CVE will not necessarily lead to high financial returns. Its value to an institution should be recognised as being other than a source of income generation. Unless this is made clear at the outset of any investment programme, it cannot rely on continuous organisational support.

These are some of the factors that tend to act as barriers; where they exist in significant numbers, only the most commited feel able to progress in spite of these obstacles.

The views of RDAs

The main barriers perceived by RDAs were firstly, the lack of commitment from senior management, and secondly, arising out of this, the lack of support systems for practitioners. These include administrative, secretarial and financial support systems, together with poor accommodation, which was described by one respondent as "verging on the inadequate".

Having sought out views on how senior staff and CVE practitioners feel about the present, we then asked them to look into the future by answering the questions:

Where would you wish you department to be in five years' time, with respect to CVE?

How can it get there?

The views of senior academic staff

In those universities where CVE units and adult education departments exist separately, the two will merge. Thus in universities, where there is a delineation between CVE and other adult education provision, this will disappear, and in both polytechnics and universities CVE will become integrated into the the mainstream work of departments. This means that CVE will gain academic respectability by being brought within a faculty or departmental structure.

However, this does not mean that CVE will disappear as a distinctive area of practice with its attendant professional skills. But changes will occur, both in the curriculum and also in terms of the skills required by the people who provide it.

Taking the curriculum changes first, it was generally agreed that in the future, there will be a wider range of subject.areas available in CVE. This will follow inevitably as a result of increasing access and an increasing awareness of the need for career updating by the professions, industry and commerce. Courses will be offered in a more flexible range of modes which will include distance learning, short modular courses which can lead onto degrees, (particularly Masters degrees), short modular courses which can be part of degrees, (particularly Masters degrees). Inevitably, this will lead to a merging of the boundaries between part-time and full-time provision.

The boundaries between education and industry will become less distinct; post graduate and undergraduate programmes will benefit from staff who have experience of working with industry and commerce.

Contacts with local industry, business and commerce will be more imaginative and make use of innovative instruction modes such as cable television, local radio networks, Prestel, and self- instructional multi media learning packages.

This means that, at the level of the individual, clients will tend to spend more of their time studying independently, so that when they attend the university or polytechnic it will be for individual instruction and/or small group work. There is an increasing demand for programmes which are flexible and affordable and which can lead towards a post graduate qualification.

Companies are becoming more discerning about the aims of the courses they require and what they regard as value for money. Already, there appears to be a trend towards an increase in demand for closed courses, possibly in-house. In future, coherent, tailor-made packages will be more in demand than than one-off short courses.

These courses will be preceded by an in-depth training needs analysis and conclude with an evaluation, including assessment of student learning, both in terms of course content and increased effectiveness at work.

There is an increasing demand from companies and individuals for accreditation, and work based learning will become an accredited part of CVE, as will the assessment of prior learning.

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These curriculum changes will mean that the function of academics involved with CVE will change. Their tasks will be far more varied than at present, and will include the academic monitoring of part time students on vocational, modular courses and the provision of educational guidance and counselling for vocational courses. Where CVE course teams require a substantial number of external experts, academic full time staff will have to acquire the skills necessary to manage these teams. In other words, the roles and tasks of staff who provide CVE will become much more diverse.

It will be necessary to organise the expansion of CVE so that departments do not become too big and unwieldy. One solution maybe to be to develop federal structures or extra faculty units which have responsibility for the curriculum in one area (e.g.Distance Learning, Quality Assurance etc.), linked to a central core which could be an administrative unit.

It was stressed repeatedly that none of these changes would come about unless they are driven from the top. This is best summarised in the following quote, "There has to be a strategic plan for promoting CVE [across the organisation] and more emphasis on promoting staff on the basis of their expertise in the skills that continuing education requires. Staff development itself needs to be seen as continuing education for staff".

These changes predicted for higher education will occur in response to the changes occurring in companies and in the professions. The links between higher education and the larger companies, in particular, are irreversible and will continue. Small companies should be encouraged to from consortia linked in with training provided by the University/Polytechnic.

Career development through education is already becoming recognised as essential by the professions in particular, but this will spread to industry and commerce. Mid-career development will become recognise as being essential, as patterns of working life change.

There will be an increase in contacts between European higher education organisations doing similar work.

The views of CVE practitioners

The points made above were identical to those made by practitioners, whose responses included the following additional observations.

CVE will become increasing influenced by the results of research into needs, methods and practice. Within universities, in particular, CVE could gain academic respectability if action research was given recognition as its research base.

The time factor was mentioned repeatedly, for example, " Departments will have to decide between devoting their time and effort to bidding for research funding or money for short course development" and "Organisations should be prepared to liberate academic staff [from their timetabled duties] so that they can have the opportunity to develop CVE".

Involved as they are at the leading edge of CVE delivery, practitioners expressed views about conditions of service.For example, "CVE could become regarded as a major source of fee income by the university and could be required to recover more of its costs."This could give staff who work in this area a degree of independence from the organisation, so that "Staff who generate their own salaries by means of CVE activities could be given more autonomy over their patterns of work, their conditions of service etc".

Universities, in particular, will need to recognise the increasing diversity of the roles of their academic staff.Recognition by means of promotion should be given to teaching and/or administration as well as research.

Finally,in order to survive the increasing competition, CVE providers will need to become more proactive and devote more consideration to quality issues.

The views of RDAs

Most of the views expressed above were also given by the RDAs.

In particular, it was stated that CVE would become a more acceptable aspect of the work all departments, in other words, its profile will be raised.

However, this will require support from funding bodies and for this to happen, CVE units and/or practitioners will have to make their presence felt. Within organisations this is best done by becoming recognised as centres of expertise and excellence and by working with other departments in a helpful and supportive way to enable them to develop high quality CVE.

It was also suggested that in universities, the present competition between research and CVE would need to be resolved if CVE is to flourish.

Discussion

This study has attempted to throw some light on the working practices and attitudes of academic staff in higher education who spend all or some of their time organising and delivering programmes of CVE.

In polytechnics, CVE has been regarded as a normal part of the curriculum for longer than it has in many universities. Perhaps because of this, the organisational structures for delivering CVE appear to be more devolved in polytechnics, in that many departments run CVE alongside their undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.However, there are some examples of specialised CVE units in polytechnics which have an administrative function .

Although the people involved in this study work in different types of organisation, and within different organisational structures, their views on the purposes of CVE and what is needed for good practice are notable for their similarities rather than for their differences. Whether they were located in a mainstream department, a CVE unit or in an adult/continuing education department, their views on what should happen, and what does not happen were in close agreement.It would seem from their responses, that organisational structure does not necessarily affect the delivery of CVE, but organisational commitment does.

Their views on organisational commitment have been eloquently expressed, and need to be taken seriously if CVE is to expand. For universities in particular, this means bringing about change.

Organisations that wish to change cannot put the responsibility for change on the shoulders of their employees. It is unreasonable for any organisation to expect its employees to develop for themselves the competences that are required to make the organisation more able to grasp initiatives. If an organisation wants to change direction it can do so in two main ways.

One is to provide training for its employees, to enable them to cope with change. If universities decide in future that more academic staff should be required to become involved in CVE (as happens in polytechnics) they need to provide opportunities for training in the skills required to practice successfully. A second option is to recruit into the organisation people who have the requisite interpersonal and negotiating skills, who can act as an interface between academics and clients.

Taking the first of these for consideration, the respondents in this study have provided in some detail their views on the skills and knowledge that they believe are necessary to implement good practice in CVE and these seem to be held in general agreement. Some of these requirements are subject specific, and relate to a particular vocational area, but these need to be part of a repertoire that includes

good practice and excellence is the ability to develop good working relationships with clients and client groups, and to be able to sustain these after the event.It is probably in this area that potential practitioners require most support.

Although the views on good practice described here cannot be regarded as a training needs analysis, they could form the basis of such. It is worth noting that interpersonal skills training did not seem to be included in any of the staff development programmes discussed in this study.

With respect of the second of the two options mentioned above, organisations could decide to recruit into CVE people who have occupational aspirations which are entrepreneurial, commercial and competitive and who feel happy in relating to customers as clients and who see their role as one of selling the organisation.

Both of these options have implications for the career development of staff who work in CVE. One of the points made many times in several different ways was the need for organisations to be more flexible in recognising excellence in CVE and rewarding it by means of promotion. This was something which was felt particularly acutely by those respondents working in universities. All the senior academics in this study were able to agree on the criteria for excellence in CVE; the difficulty is that these criteria are not easily quantifiable, as are those for research and publication. However,the creation and design of criteria which indicate excellence in CVE should be possible, but does require imagination as well as the willingness of the organisation to accept them.

A final point to make arising from this, has been made elsewhere, but it is necessary to repeat it. For CVE to flourish, there must be commitment from the top of the organisation. Those respondents who sensed that they had it, stressed its importance. Those who felt it was lacking were prepared to continue but recognised that without it, CVE would always be regarded as a marginal activity.

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Appendix 1

The organisations that took part in this study were the following:

Universities

City, Management Development Centre
Loughborough
Nottingham
Southampton

Polytechnics

Newcastle
Nottingham
Oxford

Polyversity

Ulster

Appendix 2

Questions to CVE Practitioners

1) i) What are the purposes of your job?

ii) Are they achievable?

iii) Are they fixed or can they change?

iv) How do you do you job?

v) Why do you do it? What is your motivation?

vi) Are there standards of performance?

vii) If so, how were they set?

viii) How do you go about finding out if you have failed to meet a standard of performance?

ix) How would you describe excellence in terms of practice?

x) What barriers are there to your performance?

xi) Are there opportunities available for your training and/or updating?

xii) What are the purposes of your department, with respect to CVE?

2) i) What are the purposes of your department, with respect to CVE?

ii) How do the purposes of your job relate to these?

iii) Do you feel that the purposes of the department impinge on the way you work, or do they allow you to do what you want?

iv Where would you wish your department to be 5 years from now, with respect to CVE?

v) How can it get there?

3) i) Who are the people to whom you relate to in your job?

ii) What would happen to them if you did not do the job properly?

iii) How would it affect them?

Questions to Senior Academics (Deans, Heads of Departments etc)

1) i) What are the purposes of a lecturer/practitioner in CVE?

ii) Are they achievable?

iii) Are they fixed or can they change?

iv) How does a practitioner do his/her job?

v) Why is it done? What is the motivation?

vi) Are there standards of performance?

vii) If so, how were they set?

viii) How do you go about finding out if a practitioner has failed to meet a standard of performance?

ix) What characteristics describe excellence in a practitioner?

x) What barriers are there to his/her performance?

xi) Are there opportunities available for his/her training and/or updating?

xii) What should be the purpose of such training?

2) i) What are the purposes of your department, with respect to CVE?

ii) How do the purposes of a CVE practitioner relate to these purposes?

iii) Do you feel that the purposes of the department impinge on the way a practitioner works, or do they allow him/her to do what they want?

iv) Where would you wish your department to be 5 years from now, with respect to CVE?

v) How can it get there?

3) i) Who are the people at CVE practitioner relates to in his/her job?

ii) What would happen to a CVE practitioner if he/she did not do the job properly?

iii) How would this affect the people to whom he/she relates?

Questions to RDAs

1) i) What are the purposes of a lecturer in vocational continuing education?

ii) Are they achievable?

iii) Are they fixed or can they change?

iv) How does a lecturer in CVE do his/her job?

v) Why is it done? What is the motivation?

vi) Are there standards of performance?

vii) If so, how were they set?

viii) What mechanisms exist for finding out if a lecturer has failed to meet a standard of performance?

ix) What barriers are there to his/her effective performance?

x) Are there opportunities available for training and/or updating?

xi) What should be the purpose of such training?

2) i) What are the purposes of a department of Continuing Vocational Education?

department?

iii) Do you feel that the purposes of the department impinge on the way a lecturer works, or do they allow him/her to do what they want?

iv) Where do you think a Department of Continuing Education can expect to be in 5 years time?

v) How can it get there?

3) i) Who are the people lecturer relates to his/her job?

ii) What would happen to a lecturer if he/she did not do the job properly?

iii) How would they be affected?